

To sustainably increase its place in Canada:

STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL, COMMUNITY, AND NON-MARKET HOUSING

FRAPRU - FALL 2025



INCREASE THE SHARE OF NON-PROFIT HOUSING

How can we leave the unaffordability and homelessness crises behind? We must increase the share of social and community housing in the rental housing stock. Currently it holds a minimal place: less than 10% of Canada's rental housing stock is not privately owned. To meet the most urgent needs and offer a real alternative, this needs to increase to at least 20%.

Social housing belongs to the community. It exists to meet the needs of tenants - not to turn a profit. It is publicly funded. This allows it to be rented for less than market value. When programmes are adequately funded, the poorest tenants can access subsidised housing adapted to their means.

There are three main forms of social housing:

- public housing, such as low-rental housing (HLMs);
- co-operatives; and
- non-profit housing organizations (OSBLs).

This diversity allows for different needs to be met.

NOT SYNONYMOUS

So-called affordable housing is not necessarily social, nor even really affordable, especially to tenants with low or modest incomes. Affordability is relative. Governments fund the private sector to build "affordable" housing, but the definition changes from one level of government and from one program to another. In addition, commitments to remain affordable are time-limited, providing no guarantees for the long-term. The definition of "non-market" also varies from one sector to another. It is often used to include housing for tenants in the highest income brackets and/or private developments with controlled resale prices. But we do not want the share of privately owned units in the rental housing stock to increase. In a context in which we lack adequately funded public programmes, private funders impose their own rules in "non-market" housing developments despite the expressed needs of the community.

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OUTSIDE THE PRIVATE MARKET

While the number of social housing units must increase, sustainability is equally important; they must be kept off the private market over the long term. They must be protected from resale, privatization, and from distortion of their social mission. Without protection, huge public investments could be lost, to the detriment of communities and people most in need. In some provinces, public, non-profit, and co-op housing have already been privatized in the last few years. This may have been due to underfunding, inadequate legal protection, and lack of political will but, in many cases, it also reflects a serious democratic deficit.



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HOUSING IS BEING UNDERMINED

Without safeguards, the centralization of the management of “non-market” housing, which Build Homes Canada’s portfolio approach seems to encourage, risks becoming the norm and undermining the social mission and sustainability of housing projects. Democratic governance is key to their protection. Hundreds of social housing units have been lost, sold to private owners by their directors. We need to ensure that publicly-funded non-profits have active memberships beyond the board. This becomes all the more urgent as we begin to see private developers creating non-profit “front” organizations to access public resources to build so-called affordable, “non-profit,” or “off-market” housing.

While increasing the share of social housing is welcome, this housing needs to be truly affordable and the living conditions of tenants must improve concretely in the long term. To really meet needs, social housing must remain under collective control, rooted in the community and guided by its social mission. It is therefore essential to maintain and strengthen the power of tenants and communities over their housing conditions.

SOCIAL MISSION AND ROLE OF GOVERNANCE

Democratic governance is an important means of preserving the social mission and collective ownership of housing developments:

- 1.** It strengthens the involvement of tenants and their communities, which is essential to their quality of life and housing stability;
- 2.** It helps protect their right to participate in decisions affecting their housing, a central tenant of UN-defined housing rights;
- 3.** It prevents abuses which leave non-profits vulnerable to take-overs by private owners: non-profits with inactive memberships beyond the board are more vulnerable to pressures and more likely to prioritize their immediate interests over their tenants.

ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES AND GOVERNMENTS

When public resources are used for social, non-profit or so-called off-market housing, governments and municipalities have a role to play in enforcing a minimal standard of governance and democratic control. These requirements can be included:

- in the conditions for allocating public resources (lands, loans, grants) where democratic governance could be made a funding requirement or at least a major asset in project evaluation;
- in regulatory frameworks, such as those established by funding programmes;
- in operating agreements with organizations.

TENANT PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC HOUSING GOVERNANCE IN QUEBEC

In Quebec, tenant participation in housing authorities managing public housing (HLMs) is provided for by law.

In 2002, following a mobilization by HLM tenants, a democratic space was opened to allow tenants to get involved in managing their HLM and living environment. The Quebec Housing Corporation (SHQ) Act stipulates that:



- Tenants have the right to form tenant associations for one or more buildings;
- The housing authority must establish a Residents' Advisory Committee composed of tenant associations recognized by the authority;
- Two tenants can be elected to the housing authority's board of directors.

GUIDELINES FOR DEMANDS BY HOUSING RIGHTS ADVOCATES

1. Organizations managing public housing should have guidelines requiring that tenants be consulted and a governing structure which includes community members and tenants, like required by the law in Quebec.
2. Non-profits housing should have active memberships, involving all members and not just directors.
3. The membership should be composed of, on a voluntary basis:
 - tenants of non-profits housing or their family;
 - community organizations in the area and/or organizations working with tenants.
4. Tenants and/or community groups in the neighbourhood should be represented in housing management.
5. Tools should be in place to:
 - consult tenants;
 - encourage tenant participation in the activities of the organization and/or building.

BEYOND GOVERNANCE

Social, non-profit, publicly-funded (federal, provincial, city) housing stock must be better protected. The loss of social and community housing must be monitored and constrained. The government must:

-  Provide for better monitoring of the loss of social housing and for a rigorous documentation of assets by creating tools to track the evolution of funded social housing;
-  Strengthen legal protections for all social housing holdings, whether public, cooperative, or non-profit.

SOCIAL HOUSING IS A COLLECTIVE GOOD; PRESERVING ITS MANDATE PROTECTS THAT GOOD. WITHOUT DEMOCRATIC CONTROL, EVEN HOUSING DESCRIBED AS “OFF-MARKET”, “NON-PROFIT”, AND “AFFORDABLE” BECOME VULNERABLE TO THE LOGIC OF PROFIT.